

Naturalist notebook  
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**Thames  
Science  
Center**

STACKS

**APRIL  
1970**



# NATURALIST NOTEBOOK

APRIL 1970

VOLUME VI

NO. 4

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### Front Cover:

"Female Wood Duck" by Audubon Wildlife Film photographer Walter Breckenridge. Be sure and attend the final Audubon Film of the season this month.

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# APRIL

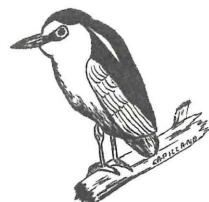
# The Month Of

## HERONS

April is the month of herons. You can find a great number of different kinds of these long-legged wading birds during April. For some unknown reason a number of species which nest south of us, fly north of their normal range in April reaching southern New England and then return south to begin the nesting season.

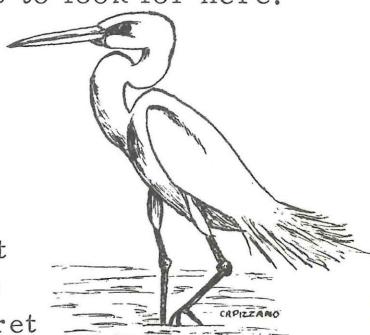
Let's look at some of the herons we can expect to find here this month.

Two herons have been with us all winter. These are the great blue heron and the black-crowned night heron. They are readily found in marshes along the coast and increase in numbers at this time of year as others join them from further south.

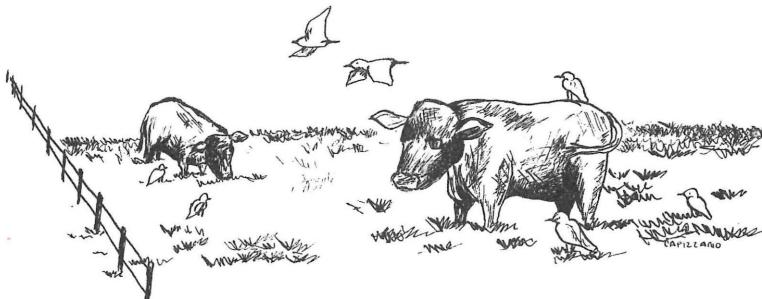


The egrets are the most beautiful members of this family. They are all decked out in beautiful white plumes which in the early 1900's almost drove them to extinction as hunters killed them by the thousands to get their plumes for women's hats. Protected, they have returned to their former numbers.

There are three kinds of egrets to look for here. The common egret is the largest being almost the size of the great blue heron. It has a yellow bill with black legs and feet. The snowy egret is only about two-thirds the size of the common egret and has a black bill with just a little yellow at the base. The legs are black, but the feet are bright yellow. The cattle egret



has a buffy color on the head and chest, a yellow bill and greenish-yellow legs and feet. Location is the best way to identify this bird. As its name implies it follows cows in a field, catching insects that cows scare up.



The strangest looking member of this group that often comes up in April is the glossy ibis. Its long bill is curved downward and it is a glossy black color similar to the grackle. It has just been in recent years that the ibis has made journeys this far north.



At the end of the month the crow-sized green heron will arrive here for the summer. It is the commonest heron we have here during the summer months and there is hardly a marsh in Connecticut that does not have a pair of green herons in it. Their neck is reddish, back greenish and legs and feet yellow or orange.

Try seeing how many herons you can find this spring.

# **APRIL'S CALENDAR**

April is the month of returning birds and emerging reptiles and amphibians.

April 1... Horsetails have pushed up through the ground.

April 2... First wood frogs calling - very late - what will this year's first date be?

April 7... Mourning cloak butterflies are out of hibernation as are red-backed salamanders and garter snakes.

April 7... Piping plovers return to our beaches to nest.

April 8... Snowy egrets are found in marshes.

April 12... Chipping sparrows arrive from the South.

April 13... The trailing arbutus or Mayflower is in blossom.

April 14... Spring azures - small iridescent blue butterflies are seen in the woods.

April 15... Barn Swallows return.

April 20... Bloodroot and hepatica are in flower.

April 20... Purple martins arrive at houses.

April 21... The full Pink Moon.

April 25... Red or purple trillium is in flower.

April 26... Daylight Savings Time begins - be sure to set clocks one hour ahead.

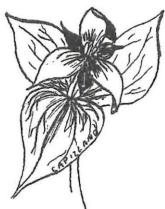
April 26... The first warbler migrant arrives - the black-and-white warbler.

April 27-30... Watch for early migrant songbirds. Last years included red-start, chimney swift, wood thrush and house wren.

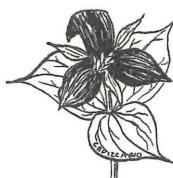


# FOOTNOTES TO NATURE

by MARY JEAN DEWIRE



TRILLIUMS



The arrival of Spring marks the beginning of many happenings in nature's world: hibernating animals emerge from their long winter sleep, insect eggs hatch, birds migrate to northern nesting grounds, and flowers poke their heads up through the ground to come into colorful bloom. Some of the prettiest early bloomers are the trilliums and I would like to tell you about them.

Trilliums are low, perennial woodland herbs belonging to the lily family. They are native to North America and eastern Asia. Of the thirty or more species, twenty are found in North America, most of them east of the Rocky Mountains. Trilliums also have the common names of wake-robin, birthroot, wood lily, and ground lily.

The name trillium is derived from the Latin word for three. It describes these plants which have all their parts in threes. Each year, the stem grows from a perennial underground stem, called a rhizome, to a height varying from 6 inches to 2 feet. At the summit, it bears 3 leaves and just above these is a single flower with 3 green sepals, 3 broad-spreading petals, 6 stamens, and a 3-chambered pistil with 3 stigmas. The fruit is a berry, often with 3 or 6 angles.

Red trillium is probably the commonest eastern trillium. The flower is on a stalk that is generally straight although it may lean sharply to one side. The petals are usually maroon or dark red, but they may be greenish, yellow, or white. This species is also known as the purple trillium, wet-dog trillium, or stinking Benjamin. As these

last two names suggest, this plant is ill-scented. It blooms from April to June and prefers moist woods.

The white trillium is the largest and most variable species. Usually, the petals are white with wavy edges although they may be pink or green or striped with green. This plant has also been reported to have its parts in twos, fours, and fives instead of threes. This is one of the handsomest species and is often cultivated in wildflower gardens. It can be found in bloom from April to June in woods and thickets but seems to prefer ravines and wooded upland slopes.

Painted trillium is perhaps the most decorative. The petals are wavy-edged and white, marked towards the base with a red or purplish blotch and streaks. The stalk is straight and the leaves taper to sharp points. This plant also blooms from April to June. It can be found in low, sandy woods and swamps.

The nodding trillium is characterized by a "nodding" flower which hangs from the end of the stalk with its opening directed downward. The stalk is curved so that the flower hangs beneath the leaves. The flower is small and the white or pink petals are only one inch long. Like the painted trillium, it prefers damp acid woods, but generally does not bloom until May.



Although the painted and nodding trilliums are quite rare locally, all four of these species can be found in Connecticut's woodlands. When you are walking through the woods on a nice Spring day, be sure to look for these lovely flowers.

# ROCK HOUNDS

by JERRY THEILER

## VULCANISM AND VOLCANOES

Vulcanism is one of the ways that the surface of the earth is built up. It happens when melted rocks called lava (above the earth's surface) are forced up.

Volcanoes occur when magma, the melted rock below the earth, pushes up through the surface. It first forms a large bump in the surface, then cracks the earth and lava pours out of the crack to form the volcano cone. Before the earth erupts, there is no cone.

By observing a volcano's cone a person can tell what kind of eruption took place. A low spread out cone is formed as lava slowly flows from the earth. This kind of volcano is called a quiet volcano and the cone it forms is called a lava cone. The opposite of this is the explosive volcano which shoots blocks and cinders into the air. The larger chunks of earth fall closer to the cone's base making it high and steep. This is called a cinder cone. Finally, a composite cone forms from a volcano called an intermediate volcano which has the qualities of both the other types.

A.

hardened



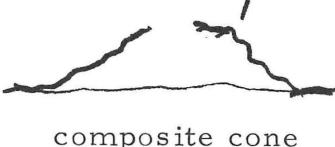
B.

cinder block



C.

Both lava and  
cinder block

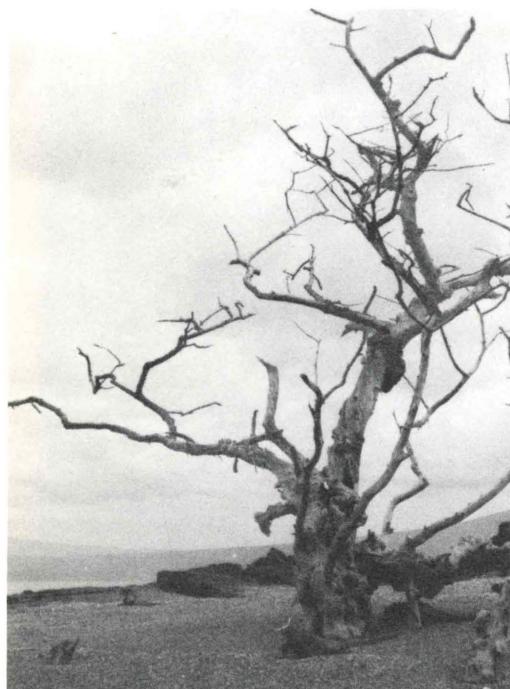


# NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY

## THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS - A PHOTOGRAPHER'S PARADISE

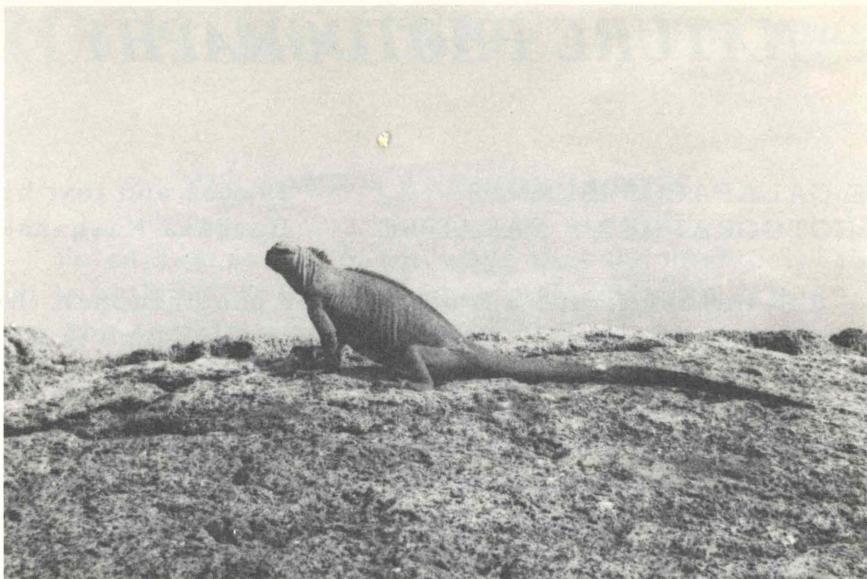
Photos and text by  
Barbara Kashanski

Let me say first I am an amateur photographer. My camera was a Hanimex - Praktica super TL which is a single lens reflex camera with a standard 50mm f. 1.8 lens. I used the same lens for all my photographs - no attachments. The black and white film used was Kodak Plus X Pan ASA 125. Whether you use an inexpensive instamatic or more expensive camera, color or black and white film, the Galapagos is a photographer's paradise. Most of all, it is one of the few places left on earth where the birds and animals have not yet learned to fear man. This places a real responsibility on the visitor not to spoil this unique situation in his zeal for good pictures. But I think that most people who go to the Galapagos quickly realize the rare opportunity being offered and respect it.



The harshness of life on the Galapagos is well expressed by this dead mangrove tree on the lava beach. Marine iguanas are at its trunk.

Taken on a cloudy day f. 22  
at 1/60th of a second. Dis-  
tance - 30 feet.



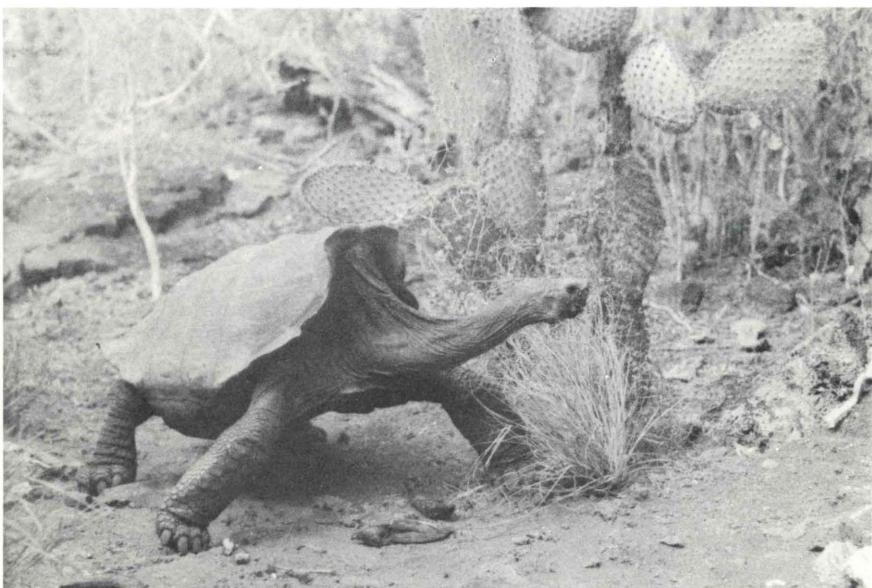
A three foot marine iguana, looking like something out of a prehistoric world patrols the beach. f-stop between 11 and 16 at 1/250th of a second. Distance — 6 feet.



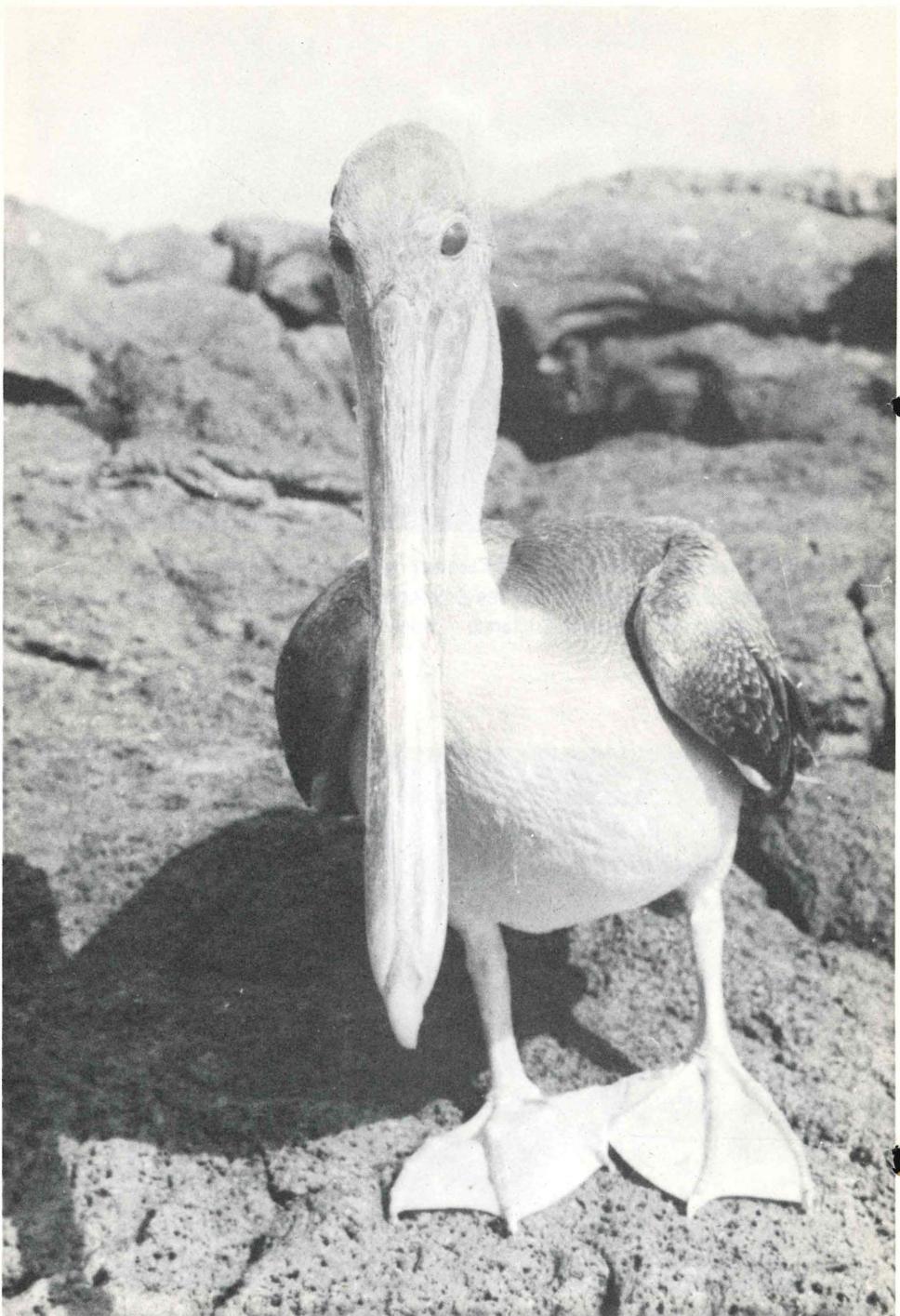
Having no enemies and spending most of its life in the water, the flightless cormorant had no need of flight and its short wings evolved. Here they are being "hung out to dry". Photographed at f. 5.6 at 1/250th of a second. Distance — 10 ft.



The cold waters of the Humboldt Current from Antarctica allow one to find the Galapagos penguin right around the Equator! Photographed at between f. 4 and 5.6 at 1/500th of a second. Distance — 9 feet.

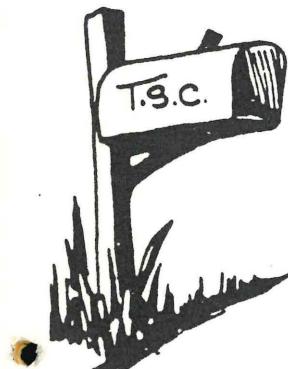


This large saddleback tortoise looks as old as he probably is. The long neck allows him to reach the pads of the cactus plants. Photographed at f. 4 at 1/500th of a second. Distance — 15 feet.



Many of the island's inhabitants are as curious about people as the people are about them. This brown pelican was no exception as he walked right up to see what was going on. Filmed at f. 11 at 1/250th of a second. Distance - 3-3½ feet.

# ARTICLES OF ADULT INTEREST



We welcome notice of Conservation activities or problems for inclusion in this section of the Naturalist's Notebook .... Please let us know of your local activity so that others may be aware of your efforts and lend their support where possible ....

AUDUBON WILDLIFE FILM: The final wildlife film of the season will be held on Sunday, April 5th at Palmer Auditorium, Connecticut College, at 3:00 P. M. Mr. William Anderson will present his film "Our Unique Water Wilderness - The Everglades". I'm sure this film about one of our most spectacular national parks will be a most interesting one. Guest tickets will be available at the door.

FRIENDS OF THE CENTER: At press time, the following people had become Friends of the Science Center: Mrs. Ellery Allen, Mrs. Priscilla Endicott, and Dr. I. A. Solomons III. It is very pleasing to see this new category of membership growing so well.

MARINE SCIENCE PROGRAM: Connecticut College is offering a 6-week summer program to under-graduate or graduate students interested in studying the basic laboratory, field techniques, and concepts of marine biology. The Science Center has brochures on the program which may be picked up by interested persons.

2ND ANNUAL NATURE FESTIVAL: Members are asked to set aside the weekend of June 20th as the Science Center will hold its 2nd Annual Nature Festival. Guided tours, demonstrations, field trips, and other programs will be featured. Further information will be sent out soon.

BIRD CLUB: The New London County Bird Club has been formed. It is primarily a field trip oriented organization and will sponsor weekly Saturday morning bird watching trips to local areas during the spring and fall migrations. In addition there will be special trips taken throughout the year. The club is open to anyone who is interested in birding. Persons who are interested should call either 536-2708 or 535-0554 regarding membership.

The field trips that will be led by the club in April are listed below. The trips are all on Saturday mornings and begin at 7:00 A.M. at the locations given below.

April 4... Rhode Is. Shoreline. Meet at Watch Hill parking lot

April 11... Rocky Neck State Part in East Lyme

April 18... Napatree Point (Beach Buggy), Watch Hill,  
Rhode Island

April 25... Barn Island Game Management Area, Stonington

TAMPERING WITH NATURE: Reader's Digest printed a story that Cornell Ecologist Dr. Lamont Cole tells to illustrate what happens when Man disrupts Nature's intricate balance. We feel it is an excellent example.

The World Health Organization sent pesticide to Borneo to kill mosquitoes. It worked fine, but didn't kill all of the roaches, which accumulated the pesticide in their bodies. Lizards living in the thatched huts ate the roaches. The pesticides slowed the lizards so that they were easily caught by the cats which then died. With the cats gone, rats moved in carrying a threat of plague. In addition, the pesticide killed a type of parasite that feeds on caterpillars; the caterpillars multiplied in the huts, where they fed on roof thatching. Then the roofs started caving in.

"SURVIVAL"  
AN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION GROUP

by MIKE WALKER

The Thames Science Center recently joined Connecticut College students and local citizens to help form an environmental protection group known as "Survival". The main purpose of the organization is to work for an improvement in the quality of life by actively opposing developments which threaten our environment and by promoting measures designed to restore a measure of ecological sanity in the world.

With news of one environmental catastrophe after another crowding our newspapers and a world population that threatens to double in little more than a generation, we believe that informed citizens must act now if we are to have a future on earth.

Even though the group has been in existence for only a few weeks, Survival has initiated a number of projects.

A weekly article on environmental issues affecting our area appears in the Connecticut College newspaper.

Representatives of the group testified in Hartford recently at a public hearing held by the clean air commission on a proposed regulation to lower the sulfur content of fossil fuels in order to reduce air pollution.

We participated in a meeting of Connecticut's Conservation Commissions in Meridan, and attended a session on Developments in the pollution control industry sponsored by Merrill Lynch, Pierce, Fenner and Smith at the Mohican Hotel here in New London.

We are presently at work developing several programs for April, the month of the Environmental Teach-In. One of these will occur on Monday, April 13th at 4:30 P.M., when Dr. Alan Guttmacher, President of World Planned Parenthood, will speak in Palmer Auditorium.

Several events including a field trip to Pachaug State Forest, potential Jetport city site, are being planned for the week of April 20th. Word of these events will appear in local newspapers, and further information may also be obtained by phoning the Science Center.

All activities will be open to the public and community help for Survival is urgently solicited. The group meets every Thursday at 6:30 P.M. in Room 122 of Hale Laboratory on the Connecticut College campus. All meetings are open to the public. We welcome your help, ideas, and concern very much. If our meeting time is inconvenient but you are interested in Survival, please contact me at the Science Center.\*

\*EDITOR'S NOTE: The Science Center hopes that its members will support this group. Too often we fail to realize the extent of the environmental crisis locally because we do not have the heavy pollution problems of the large cities. Do not sit back and say "It can't happen here so why worry" because it can happen here. Don't wait until all of our streams look like the Oxoboxo in Montville, or our air constantly smells horrible instead of just when the wind blows in certain directions. The time is now - the question is survival!

# FIELD NOTES

FEBRUARY 15 - MARCH 15

This period is one of the quietest we have during the year. It is just before the spring migration really begins and there seems to be a low point in bird populations at this time. Low population can best be illustrated by the BLUE JAY. Quite abundant in the early winter numbers dropped off in January and many people have reported having no jays at their feeders for several weeks. The reason for the lack of jays is a more southern movement than normal.

Winter finches have also dropped off in numbers at feeders. While there are still a few reports of COMMON REDPOLLS, PINE SISKENS, RED CROSSBILLS and EVENING GROSBEAKS visiting feeders, they are very infrequent and in small numbers. North of the reporting area in Canterbury, up to 36 EVENING GROSBEAKS still come daily to feeders.

Essex, Old Saybrook, & Old Lyme: PINTAILS were in the South Cove of Saybrook on Feb. 21st, and two HORNED OWLS were calling and clearly visible from the home of Mrs. William Boyd in Essex on the 17th. A handsome drake REDHEAD DUCK was found on the front porch of Priscilla Endicott's home in Essex the end of February. Its right wing had been clipped so it could not fly, and it was extremely weak from hunger and shock. Two weeks of careful attention and care by Mrs. Endicott has resulted in the bird's excellent recovery. The clipped wing, however will prevent the duck from ever flying again. It is a shame to think that someone did this to the bird in an attempt to keep it as a pet. Had it not been found it would have surely been killed by predators.

Waterford and New London: Signs of spring included SKUNK CABBAGE flowers out on March 6th and male RED-WINGED BLACKBIRDS singing on territory on Feb. 27th - a week earlier than normal. The WOODCOCK that was heard giving its courtship flights off Great Neck Road in Waterford on March 4th was two weeks early. A flock of 21 PIED-BILLED GREBES seen off Ocean Beach on Feb. 23rd is a remarkably high number for this bird that is usually solitary or in groups of 3 or 4. A RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER was back at a feeder in Quaker Hill after being away for two months. A CAROLINA WREN is regularly visiting a feeding station and singing his rather loud but pretty song along Woodland Road in Waterford. A single immature WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL was feeding on grass seeds in Williams Park in New London on Feb. 13th.

Mystic and Stonington: A WOODCHUCK was seen in a field in Stonington on March 1st. CROCUS were in bloom on both High Street and Pearl Street in Mystic on March 7th. A pair of SHOVELER DUCKS were on the Mystic River on Feb. 25th and a flock of 36 CANVASBACKS is an unusually high number on this river.

Rhode Island Shoreline: An adult male MARSH HAWK (gray in color and for some reason very rare in this area) was seen at Matunuck on March 6th. At Moonstone Beach there was a flock of over 100 COMMON Mergansers on Feb. 28th. The number of COMMON LOONS off Quonochontaug remains at about 40 birds. RED-WINGED BLACKBIRDS were singing on territories in Watch Hill on Feb. 28th.

Contributors to this column were: Mr. & Mrs. Kenneth Bates, Grace Bissell, Janet Boyd, Bob & Mary Jean Dewire, Kay Eastman, Priscilla Endicott, Paul Garrett, Charles Levonius, Beth Schad, and Mike Walker.

# **ACTIVITIES FOR APRIL**

- April 5... 3:00 P.M. Audubon Wildlife Film. See page 11 for details.
- April 8... An adult field trip to watch the spectacular performance of the courting male woodcock. Location and time will not be determined until close to the trip date. Interested persons should call the Center for information.
- April 18... 10:00 A.M. A Junior Workshop for Grades 3, 4, and 5. "Looking for Amphibians". Registration required. Meet at the main entrance of the Arboretum.
- April 21... 10:00 A.M. A Junior members field trip to beachcomb along the shore. For Grades 1, 2, and 3. Meet at the parking lot at Harkness Memorial State Park.
- April 23... 10:00 A.M. A Junior Members field trip at the shore for Grades 4, 5, and 6. Same details as April 21st.

See page 12 for a listing of the spring migration bird walks to be conducted by the New London County Bird Club.

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# NATURALIST NOTEBOOK

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ROBERT DEWIRE  
*Editor*

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***Trailing Arbutus or Mayflower***

Photo by R. Dewire